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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0733
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001772

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Peaceful Protests Across Somaliland

REF: Nairobi 1729

Summary

11. (SBU) As Somaliland's political crisis continues, on August 20 the two opposition parties protested peacefully in all six regions of the self-declared republic. Although police tried to block demonstrations in public areas, thousands of protestors took to the streets. Opposition party leaders condemned recent events and called for freedom of speech during the election period. There were few arrests, and although shots were reportedly fired into the air in an attempt to disburse the protestors, there were no casualties. Days before the protest, opposition leaders turned down President Riyale's invitation to meet, pending the NEC withdrawal of its decision to hold elections without the voter list. On August 19, the Guurti resolved to remain neutral in the political disputes and to help solve the election crisis. Also on August 19, an Ethiopian delegation arrived in Hargeisa raising hopes that international mediation might be able to help break the impasse. End Summary.

Peaceful Protests by Thousands
in All Six Provinces

12. (SBU) On August 20 thousands of opposition supporters protested in all six of Somaliland's provinces. Opposition parties Kulmiye and UCID organized the demonstrations to protest the decision by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the government to hold elections on September 27 without a voter registration list, despite a parliamentary ruling to the contrary. In Hargeisa, by approximately 8:00 a.m. local time in on August 20, protestors began to assemble in the town's Freedom Garden park, according to our contacts. Police blocked major intersections and access points to this area, but protestors still converged in front of Kulmiye headquarters. In their speeches to the Hargeisa gathering, opposition leaders "Silanyo" and Warabe condemned the recent actions of the government and called for freedom of speech during the election period. At least one media report suggests that security forces fired numerous shots into the air in an attempt to disperse the demonstrators. There were no reports of casualties.

13. (SBU) There were similar peaceful demonstrations in all of Somaliland's major cities. In Burao and Erigavo, police blocked protestors from converging in major public areas, but demonstrations took place in the streets. Reports indicate that one police officer was injured and three opposition party supporters were arrested after fights broke out in the town of Las Anod. Leaders of both parties were buoyant as the turnout was much greater than they had hoped or expected.

Opposition Places Condition
on Riyale Meeting

14. (SBU) In an apparent effort to forestall the protests, President Riyale invited opposition presidential candidates Faisal Ali (UCID) and Ahmed Mohamed "Silanyo" (Kulmiye) to discuss on August 19 an end to the political crisis. Our contacts interpret the invitation as a sign Riyale is becoming sensitive to internal and international pressure to resume talks with the opposition. In their joint response, Ali and "Silanyo" agreed to meet, with the precondition that the National Electoral Committee (NEC) should obey Parliament's ruling to rescind its July 27 decision that the elections should proceed on September 27 without a previously agreed to voter registration list.

15. (SBU) Faisal Waarabe, Chairman of the UCID, told us that UCID and Kulmiye representatives will meet with the NEC August 20 to ask that it withdraw its "unilateral" and "illegal" determination, and that it endorse stakeholder consensus as a way forward. Faisal insisted that they did not put any direct preconditions for Riyale to meet. Prior to the meetings, the opposition parties also plan to formally ask for international mediation of the talks with Riyale to ensure that all parties honor their word. They thought that perhaps Ethiopia could play that role.

House of Elders Votes to
Maintain Neutrality in

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Political Disputes

16. (SBU) On August 19, Somaliland's Guurti (House of Elders) passed a resolution designed to end its internal differences. The resolution was passed by a vote of 63 for, one against, with the Speaker abstaining. The articles of the resolution state that the members of the Guurti should be united and remain neutral in the political disputes in the country. Another article of the resolution held that it is the Guurti's role to help find a sustainable solution to Somaliland's political crisis.

Ethiopian Delegation
Engages Stakeholders

17. (SBU) On August 19, an Ethiopian delegation led by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu, arrived in Hargeisa. At their meeting, Kulmiye and UCID presented Alemu with a position paper which included the following points:

-- The President must state publicly that he is willing to walk back his irrational decision to be the jury, the judge and the executioner on the conduct of the elections. Unless the rules of conduct are respected by all, including the President, a solution to the problem will not be found.

-- All the necessary tools required to conduct this election in a timely fashion are ready and should be used. The current voter list should be accepted.

-- Interpeace must be allowed to resume its role.

-- The NEC has lost credibility and must be replaced.

-- A new body (comprising the three parties) must be created to administer the country until a date for a new election can be set. The six presidential and vice presidential candidates will not be permitted to participate in this body.

US Media Engagement Receives

Positive Response

18. (SBU) On August 18, AF PDAS Phil Carter was interviewed by Horn Cable TV. Excerpts were broadcast the same evening. The interview was translated into Somali and re-broadcast on August 19. We have received extremely positive feedback on the interview. A government representative told us, "Ambassador Carter expressed the same sentiments as the majority of Somalilanders." He encouraged us to keep up the pressure as the wider public appreciates the continued engagement by the United States. We understand that the Foreign Minister has requested an interview with Horn Cable to respond to PDAS Carter's points.

RANNEBERGER